

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parables of the rash builder and the reckless king** in Luke 14:28-33. These parables are concerning DISCIPLESHIP IN GOD'S KINGDOM. Please read Luke 14:25-35 by yourself, or take turns in the group to read a few verses each.

(S) Luke 14:28-33 says, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'. Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the stories of these two parables.

A tower may be a watchtower in a vineyard, a storeroom (Isa 5:2) or an entire farm-building. Every good businessman figures out the cost of any project. Onlookers are notorious for always being ready to turn situations into a joke or to put another person down, especially when he fails.

(S) Accounts of kings who have waged war with other kings have filled the history books of the world. Considering the outcome of a battle is the main task of a king and his generals. Especially when they know that they are outnumbered, they are forced to make a decision: either to lose the battle or to sue for peace. Sending a delegation and asking for the terms of peace is a far better decision than to go into battle against all odds and suffer an irreparable defeat.

(T) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

What is the context of these parables?

The setting of the parables is contained in Luke 14:25-27. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51) through Perea and he was addressing a huge crowd about *discipleship*. Jesus taught that anyone who wanted to become his disciple must realise that there was a cost attached to discipleship. It was not Jesus who estimated the cost of completing the task, because he already knew that in order to save people he would have to die on the cross. And he also knew that the task of building God's kingdom would only be completed with disciples, not with superficial followers. Not Jesus, but the people who desire to become disciples, must estimate the cost of discipleship. The context of these parables speaks about people who must consider the cost of following Jesus Christ as a disciple.

The stories of these two parables are contained in Luke 14, verses 28-30 and verses 31-32.

The explanation or application of the parable of the rash builder is not given and must be deduced from the context: A Christian must figure out the cost of discipleship before he acts. The explanation or application of the parable of the reckless king is implied in verses 33-35: If a Christian must act, then he must act in the most sensible way! If he cannot win, then he must sue for peace! If he does not want to be rejected, he must be good salt!

(S) The first characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is to hate. The meaning is that a disciple should be wholehearted devoted to Jesus Christ. According to verse 26, a disciple must *hate* his family and his own life in order to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that he should hate his parents and family in the sense of *dislike, detest or abhor* them or abandon them and forget them. The Bible commands Christians to care for their parents, to love their wives, to raise their children in the instruction of the Lord and to even love their neighbour as they love themselves. The word *hate* in the original language means *to prefer less* as the parallel in Matthew 10:37 clearly shows. If there is a conflict between a family member and Christ, and the choice is between obeying a family member and obeying Christ, then the family member's wish, no matter how ardent, should be rejected. *The disciple's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ and no other relationship may replace it!* He chooses Jesus Christ so unconditionally as his Lord and Guide that he makes all other loyalties and relationships subordinate to his loyalty and devotion to Christ. Jesus Christ must always have the pre-eminence (Col 1:18)! Thus, a disciple *loves Jesus Christ more* than any other relationship. He *prefers Jesus Christ above* his parents, his own family and even himself.

(T) The second characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is to carry his cross. The meaning is that a disciple should sacrifice his own ambitions and security. A disciple accepts the sacrifice, rejection and suffering of being a committed Christian. This is the real meaning of 'carrying his cross'.

(S) The third characteristic of a true disciple is to give up everything he has. The meaning is that a disciple should be totally committed to Jesus Christ. Verse 33 says, "Anyone who does not give up everything he has, cannot be my disciple." Thus, a disciple prefers Jesus Christ above all possessions, relationships and ambitions of this world. He is willing to lay aside, to give up, to say good-bye to anything and everything, anyone and everyone, in order to follow Jesus Christ. A disciple does not allow the love of money, success, fame and power to disqualify him from being a disciple of Jesus Christ. If there is a conflict between pursuing materialism, success, fame or power on the one hand and following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly on the other hand, then the pursuit of materialism, success, fame or power should be rejected. If the choice is between making money and following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly, then the attraction of materialism and worldly success should be rejected. If the choice is between the possession of power, success or fame and the following of Christ wholeheartedly, then the ambitions towards power, success and fame should be rejected. *The disciple's supreme commitment is to Jesus Christ and no other commitment may replace it!*

(T) The fourth characteristic of a true disciple is to be like salt. The meaning is that a disciple should have good influence on his society. Verse 34-35 says, "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out." Salt is a substance that combats decay on the one hand and that imparts flavour on the other hand. Christian disciples must be like genuine salt. They must combat the moral and spiritual decay in their society and their words and actions must be like a pleasant flavour to the people around them (Col 4:6).

Salt that has become tasteless cannot fertilise the soil or do any good even to the manure pile. The formal religion of laws of the religious leaders and teachers of the Jews only burdened their followers. Through centuries these religious leaders and teachers superimposed many of their own opinions and decisions upon God's law in the Bible! They changed God's law in the Bible and their legalistic opinions and decisions became like tasteless salt. These people had no good influence on the society of Israel and Jesus said that they would be cast out of God's kingdom (Matthew 8:12). Jesus warned his listeners that people who were trained in the knowledge of the truth in the Bible and subsequently resolutely set themselves against the exhortation of the Holy Spirit and became hardened in their opposition against Jesus Christ, would not be able to repent (Mt 12:32; Heb 6:4-6). Unswerving loyalty to Jesus Christ is not at all in harmony with the natural cravings of the sinful human nature. It is nevertheless absolutely necessary. Jesus warned his listeners, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This means that when a person hears the words of Jesus Christ, he should not delay, but act immediately!

(S) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLES.**

Let us take turns to describe which of the details in these two parables are really essential or relevant. Jesus does not give any of the details any particular meaning. The details must therefore be interpreted in relation to the context.

Building a tower is relevant detail. Building a tower is a big project. It costs a lot of money, a lot of energy and a lot of time. In the context it refers to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. The decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ is a very important decision: It may influence your financial situation, your relationship to your parents, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and it may change the direction of your whole life!

(T) Estimating the cost to see whether you could complete the task is an essential detail, because it is the central point of the first parable. Every person is responsible to first consider the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. He must decide whether or not he is willing to give Jesus Christ the first place in his life, relationships, plans and decisions.

(S) A king about to go to war against another king is a relevant detail. In the context, the first king represents the would-be disciple of Jesus Christ, that is, you and me. The second king, who has a much greater army, represents Jesus Christ.

(T) Considering whether he is able to oppose the second king is an essential detail, because it is the central point of the second parable. Before a king or general goes out to battle he first considers his odds to win and his strategy of battle. The point of the second parable is that you and I must consider our odds against Jesus Christ if we refuse to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. You and I must consider the fact that Jesus Christ and his army of angels are many times stronger than we are. You and I must consider whether we will submit and become a disciple of Jesus Christ or not. We must choose because Jesus Christ is already on his way to us! If we are wise, we will consider our odds and our strategy. But we must act! We must choose between resisting Jesus Christ and his army of angels or submitting to him. Jesus Christ demands submission. He is the King of kings. Jesus Christ demands a decision, a choice. Jesus Christ is certainly going to return to this earth and then he will judge all the living and the dead! No one will be able to flee from

the Final Judgement. No one will be able to escape from the final confrontation with Jesus Christ! The only choice for people is to submit willingly and wholeheartedly to the King of kings or to be destroyed.

(S) POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.

The parables of the rash builder and the reckless king in Luke 14:25-35 are about *discipleship in God's kingdom*.

The main message of the parable of the rash builder is the following: "Every person is responsible to consider the cost of discipleship: He must figure out the cost before he acts. He must look before he leaps."

Discipleship is a fundamental characteristic of God's kingdom. The people of God's kingdom consider the cost of following Jesus Christ for the rest of their lives. In the context, a person must consider the cost of discipleship especially in terms of his relationship to his parents, his own wife and children, his brothers and sisters, and his own life and ambitions. The cost may be that he must choose for Jesus Christ and the cause of Jesus Christ above his relationship with his parents, family and even above his own ambitions and security.

(T) The main message of the parable of the reckless king is the following: "Every person is responsible to choose for or against becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ: Although he considers which strategy is the best, he must act! Although he looks before he leaps, he must leap! Neutrality with respect to Jesus Christ is impossible!"

To choose is the human response to God's initial demand to estimate the cost and to submit wholeheartedly to his lordship. It means the same as to yield and to submit with all your heart and mind and life to Jesus Christ.

The central point of the second parable is more than merely counting the cost or considering the consequences of one's choice *if* one has to make a choice. The choice of the first king was not between attacking or not attacking the second king and thus remaining neutral. The choice of the first king was between being attacked by the second king or suing for peace. While the rash builder had a choice to build or not to build, the first king was attacked, whether he liked it or not. The rash builder had freedom of choice, but the reckless king had no freedom of choice! The second king forced the choice on him. The first king had to make a decision!

Likewise, every human being in every nation in the world that hears about Jesus Christ coming must make a decision for or against Jesus Christ. He must act. Neutrality with respect to Jesus Christ is impossible.

Discipleship is a fundamental characteristic of God's kingdom. People in this world are continually confronted by the attacks of their own sinful natures in them, the sinful world and the enemies of Jesus Christ around them and the evil spirits above them. But Jesus Christ is also on his way to them and knocking on their door, not to destroy them, but to save and change them. The people in this world are confronted by the most important choice or decision in their lives: the choice between also becoming an object of attack by Jesus Christ, the King of kings, or by submitting to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. They must consider and decide what they will lay aside, give up or say good-bye to in order not to suffer an overwhelming defeat in their relationship to Jesus Christ and consequently suffer the irreparable loss of real spiritual life. The worst strategy or the most foolish thing they can do is *to think that they can remain neutral and therefore do not have to make a decision!* The best strategy or the only wise, sensible and reasonable thing to do is to make a decision, to make a commitment. It is to become reconciled to the God of the Bible through faith in Jesus Christ and to follow Jesus Christ as his disciple all the days of their life.

(S) POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLES WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE.

I want to compare *the parable of the rash builder* with Matthew 6:33, which says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The cost of discipleship is to first seek the kingship of the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and to do what is right in his eyes. It is to seek this above running after material things like food, drink and clothes.

(T) I want to compare *the parable of the reckless king* with Luke 12:57-59. It teaches that a good strategy for discipleship is to judge for oneself what is right. If one cannot win a lawsuit, then sue for a settlement out of court. If you do not want to be condemned in the Final Judgement, then get reconciled to Jesus Christ. Luke 13:1-5 teaches that a good strategy for discipleship is to repent before it is too late! Jesus warned "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." 2 Corinthians 6:2 teaches that the best strategy for discipleship is to act immediately and not to procrastinate. Matthew 19:20-24 teaches that the best strategy for discipleship is to give up whatever may be standing in the way of following Jesus as a disciple! For someone it may be to give up certain possessions. For another it may be to give up certain ambitions of power, success or fame. By doing this, he will be assured of meeting the favour of Jesus Christ, the King of kings, at his return to this world!

(S) I want to compare *the parable of the salt that lost its saltiness* with 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 3:3. It teaches that the best strategy for discipleship is to have good influence on one's society, including family, neighbours, opponents and even enemies. The best strategy to win a battle is to combat moral and spiritual decay, like salt. It is to spread the good news of the gospel, like a fragrant aroma. It is to live a transparent Christian life among people, like a letter known and read by everyone.

(T) **POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLES ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP.**

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of these two parables.

The parable of the rash builder teaches that you and I must *consider the cost of following Jesus Christ as his disciple*. The cost may be that you and I must choose for Jesus Christ and the cause of Jesus Christ above our relationship with our parents, family and even above our own ambitions and security.

(S) The parable of the reckless king teaches that you and I must *make a choice for or against becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ*. We cannot remain neutral! We must give up whatever stands between us and following Jesus Christ. WE must consider what we must lay aside, give up or say good-bye to in order not to suffer an overwhelming defeat in our relationship to Jesus Christ. There is no such thing as being a Christian for a little bit by making a few outward changes in our life-style and then carrying on with our life as we please.

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the rich show-off and the beggar. As preparation, please read Luke 16:19-31.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".